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Citi Foundation and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to support the development of small business to preserve the unique biodiversity of the Altai Mountains

The Citi Foundation has allocated \$100,000 for nature conservation in the Altai Republic

Moscow — In collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Citi Foundation has launched a program to promote the development of small business in order to preserve the unique biodiversity of the Altai Mountains.

The program will provide micro-grants to local people to help them start their own legal businesses to support nature conservation in the region, in areas such as rural tourism and ecotourism in the habitats of the Altai mountain sheep and snow leopard, production of felt souvenirs or increasing the quality of livestock. By the end of 2011, about 600 local residents will have received training in the skills needed to develop their own businesses and 45 families (180-200 people) will have obtained grants to develop small enterprises. The program aims to support the local populations that inhabit the most important areas for nature conservation in the Kosh-Agach and Ulagan districts of the Altai Republic.

The total population of the Altai Republic is over 200,000 people, the majority of which are engaged in animal husbandry and live and work in the Altai Mountains and steppe. It is well known that one of the biggest problems impeding the development of remote regions in Russia such as Altai is unemployment, which in some villages in the region reaches 90%. As a result, the standards of living for local residents are very low and the income of many herder families is only \$1,000-2,000 a year. These factors contribute to the proliferation of poaching and the trade of plants and animals, which poses a direct threat to the biodiversity of the region. This is why to ensure the protection of Altai's unique natural wildlife, standards of living for local communities need to be improved and there need to be alternative opportunities for the local population to generate income.

«The Citi Foundation's main goal is to create opportunities for people living below the poverty line to improve their standards of living. Thanks to our cooperation with the World Wildlife Fund, we will also be able to help protect the unique biodiversity of the Altai Republic,» said Tatiana Avramenko, Corporate Social Responsibility Manager at Citibank Russia.

«We are grateful to Citi for their support of this unique program. We are confident that the results of the program will promote sustainable development in the region. The program focuses on eliminating the root causes of the problem — the low standards of living of the local population — rather than its consequences — the extinction of wildlife. Once there are opportunities for people to develop their own businesses and ensure a stable legal wage, the local people will lose interest in poaching as a source of income and instead become actively involved in the conservation of Altai's nature and culture as the basis of their prosperity,» said Alexander Bondarev, head of the Altai-Sayan division of WWF Russia.

The Altai Republic has a unique landscape and biological and cultural diversity: more than 2,000 types of plants, over 80 types of animal and in excess of 350 types of birds can be found in the republic as well as a whole host of historical and cultural monuments. In the Altai Mountains there are two biosphere reserves, one national park, five natural parks and two nature reserves. More than 20% of the republic is a protected environmental area. The republic also plays host to the Golden Mountains of Altai UNESCO world heritage site. The Altai Mountains are home to the world's largest populations of snow leopards and Altai mountain sheep, which are both included in Russia's Red Book of rare and endangered wildlife.

Citi has already supported a number of WWF initiatives. At the beginning of November 2010, Citi and WWF announced the launch of a joint project to restore broadleaved pine forests in the south-west of the Primorsky region. In spring 2011, with support from Citi, WWF volunteers will plant one million Korean cedar and fir seedlings. By supporting this project, Citi will celebrate its one-millionth client in Russia, an important milestone reached in 2010.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF), one of the largest international independent nature preservation organizations unites about 5 million permanent supporters and operates in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop degradation of the planet's environment to achieve harmony between human and nature. WWF's strategic priorities are preserving biodiversity of the planet, securing sustainable use of renewable natural resources and advocacy of actions to reduce environmental pollution

and wasteful use of nature.

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